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ABSTRACT

A variety of reports, both conjectural and scientific, as well as current beliefs of the youth counterculture have identified university athletes as being more politically conservative than nonathletes. The present study evaluated the political attitudes of students of the University of Western Ontario on several dimensions: a) "global conservatism-liberalism" as measured by the McClosky Scale, b) self-assessments of political ideology, c) political activism as measured by the Rehberg Scale of Political Activism, and d) Likert issues related to political ideologies. A questionnaire mailed to selected athletes and nonathletes was the method for data collection. The analysed data indicated that, regardless of measure employed or variable introduced, the athletes and nonathletes were predominantly liberal in their ideologies. These facts applied to "global liberalism" as well as "issue-oriented liberalism" and were interpreted to indicate the following: a) rejection of the American, data-based theoretical propositions regarding the political beliefs of Canadian athletes or b) intrusion of methodological problems such as a social desirability response set. The need for replication of the study was emphasized, particularly in the United States, where more concern has been expressed regarding political ideologies of athletes in comparison with nonathletes in the university setting. (Author/JA)

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THE POLITICAL ATTITUDES OF CANADIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A COMPARISON BETWEEN ATHLETES AND NONATHLETES

by

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From 1960[1] to 1970[2], the universities of North America were faced with considerable student unrest which led, at times, to violent confrontations between opposing groups of students, as well as between students and police. The formal and underground news sources gave considerable coverage to these events, but, in relation to the confrontations between the students themselves, one group came to be identified as being willing to come to the aid of the "establishment". This group was identified by news sources as being made up of "jocks"; the implication being that student anti-protesters were intercollegiate athletes of conservative political persuasion.

Sociological research conducted over the same period of time investigated the relationship between athletic participation and adherence to various dimensions of conservative political ideologies and predispositions toward political activism.

Puretz (1969:6) concluded from his study that intercollegiate athletes "may value their personal rights and the rights of others significantly less than Non-athletes. They

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[1] Greensboro, N.C.; lunch counter sit-ins by black students, 1960.

[2] Kent, Ohio; Kent State University students shot, 1970.

are quite willing to submerge their democratic prerogatives for athletic excellence..."

In 1970, Schafer and Phillips reported that among their sample of secondary school students, the interscholastic athletes gave more acceptance for the rules governing school behavior and favoured the adoption of even stricter codes.

In a study focussing on the political beliefs of 937 secondary school students in New York State, Rehberg and Cohen (1971:14) found that athletes were more conservative than nonathletes on three dimensions; the acceptance of authority, traditionalism with regard to their view of American society, and acceptance of the draft as a legal obligation rather than a moral decision.

Parallel research by Webb (1969), Petrie (1971a, 1971b), Mantel and VanderVelden (1971), and Maloney and Petrie (1972) into the utilization of achievement criteria in evaluating performance in the milieu of sport showed athletics to be an agency for the development or refinement of value structures relevant for effective participation in the adult economic (or occupational) role.

Recognizing the close relationship between the political and economic institutions it was possible to subscribe to

Schafer's summary statement to the effect that athletics

> serve first and foremost as a social device for steering young people..into the mainstream of American life through the overt and convert teaching of "appropriate" attitudes, values, norms, and behavior patterns. As a result, school sports tend to exert more of a conservatizing and integrating influence in the society than an innovative or progressive influence (1971).

Little empirical research has been conducted into this area among university athletes, but it was believed that intercollegiate athletics programs fulfil the same functions. Additionally, it was believed that there would not be substantial differences in the political beliefs of Canadian and American athletes and that the following research hypothesis would be tenable:

> Intercollegiate athletes will provide greater support for conservative political idelogies than university students who do not participate in athletics.

In reviewing the socialization and personality research, it became obvious that there was considerable variation in the use of the terms, conservative and liberal. For the purposes of this study, a <u>conservative political ideology</u> as defined as a cluster of values providing support for the established order, maintenance of the status quo, resistence to social change, belief that success is accessible for all who wish

to participate fully in the process and that failure is evidence of the power of Social Darwinism. A liberal political ideology was defined as a cluster of values which provide support for the general welfare of all members of society, support the provision of social welfare, and, acceptance and encouragement of controlled social change.

In addition, it was found necessary to differentiate between a "global ideological structure" which was more general in application, and a "specific ideological structure" which related to specific social issues where peer influences, expediency, or a response to well publicized opinions might lead to a position at variance to the expressed general position.

The Sample

Systematic random sampling was employed to select two subsamples from lists of male and female intercollegiate athletes, and members of the student body registered at the University of Western Ontario for the academic year 1971-72.

Differential sampling rates were employed to select 226 athletes and 227 nonathletes from these lists.

The Survey Instrument

Extensive use of judgemental groups and protesting were employed in the development of the questionnaire. The instrument in its final form was an amalgram of the following units:

(a) The McClosky Political Conservatism Scale (1958)

(b) A measure of Self Reported Political Ideology

(c) Attitudinal statements using the Likert format reflecting extreme viewpoints on specific political issues. These statements provided an opportunity to evaluate issue oriented conservatism or liberalism. A total of thirty eight statements, grouped into six subscales, were used.

(d) The Rehberg Political Activism Scale (1971), and

(e) Background questions such as sex, socio-economic background, and academic program (professional or non-professional.)

The questionnaire was distributed by mail and follow-up techniques were employed to maximize return rates. For the combined group, 64.96 percent of the questionnaires were returned (athletes 66.96 per cent: nonathletes 62.99 per cent)

Data was analyzed using the Guilford technique for determining internal consistency (Guilford 1954) and the Chi Square test for k independent samples (Siegal 1956).

Results and Discussion

McClosky Scale of Political Conservatism. Analysis of the differences in the response patterns indicated that, in all cases, no significant differences were evident in the reponses of the two groups. On every item except one, the majority endorsed the responses at the liberal end of the continua. On item number seven, "No matter how we like to talk about it, political authority really comes not from us, but from some higher power," over 50 per cent endorsed conservative responses (degrees of agreement with the item).

TABLE 1 HERE

It was evident that the hypothesized relationship between athletic participation and the development of "global conservatism" was not supported in this analysis. Athletes and nonathletes, regardless of sex, socio-economic background, or academic program, provided relatively consistent endorsement of "global liberalism" as their preferred response to the McClosky Scale.

Self Reported Political Ideology. As a simple check on "global political ideology" a fixed choice self report scale, providing

for responses ranging from Revolutionary to Extreme Conservative, was employed in this study.

Collapsing of adjacent cells to fulfil the assumptions of the Chi Square test was found to be necessary, with the three remaining categories being Liberal to Revolutionary, Middle-of-the-Road, and Conservative to Extreme Conservative.

The results showed that a majority of both athletes and nonathletes regarded themselves as liberal. No statistically significant difference in the endorsement patterns was present.

TABLE 2 HERE

No differences were found when the various control variables were included, and it was clear that there was agreement between this measure and the responses to the Mc Closky Sclae. Again, the hypothesized relationship was not supported by the data.

Issure Oriented Political Ideologies. A total of 18 of the 38 items was found to be acceptable under the rather severe standard employed to determine internal consistency (the correlation was to be statistically significant between the item score and the protoscale score at the .05 level, and, in addition, had to exceed an $r_s = +0.50$).

Both the athletes and nonathletes were conservative with respect to the use of violence and property damage as political tactics, and with respect to the majority of the items evaluating the Canadian political-legal system. Both groups were liberal in their reactions to abortion, and university related issues, and in response to the majority of the drug questions.

TABLE 3 HERE

The members of the athletic group differed significantly from the nonathletes on only three of the accepted items. They were more conservative with respect to their objection to shoplifting as a political act, and in their higher regard for the independently organized Turn-In-A-Pusher Program in London. The athletes almost totally rejected the idea that physical attacks against radical demonstrators are justified. Certainly, this finding was contrary to the sterotypic belief patterns held by many about athletes during the latter part of the 1960's.

The introduction of the control variables of sex, socio-economic status, and academic program provided few instances of increased specification of the relationships.

The interesting feature deriving from the total analysis of responses to particular social issues was the breakdown of the solid support for global liberal positions in the face of specific political questions. This, of course, points to a difficulty the researcher faces in studies of political socialization, political attitudes and ideologies. Support for the separation of the constructs into global and specific or issue-oriented categories was clearly demonstrated here, but the attitude - behavior problem remains.

Rehberg Political Activism Scale. This scale utilized a simple agree-disagree format to determine the individual's support for activism in relation to a cause, as well as the acceptance of present laws related to social issues.

There was considerable agreement between the athletes and nonathletes on most of the items, with support being given to take part in a march, organize meetings, support strikes and sit-ins, and participation in legitimate political campaigns. The members of both samples gave support for existing laws regarding heroin use, and could readily accept the existing powers of the police and university administration. The laws regarding marijuana use could not be accepted by over 58 per cent of the respondents.

The athletes gave significantly greater support for activism in the organization of meetings, and for adherence to the existing laws on heroin use.

TABLE 4 HERE

The introduction of the various control variables provided only minimal added specification of the relationships.

In total, these results indicated that the members of the Canadian university group sampled were more liberal in response to social activism than was the case in the Rehberg and Cohen high school group (1971).

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The apparent invalidation of the theoretical system behind the hypotheses guiding this study was a subject of considerable concern and various reasons may be advanced in explanation.

1. As the supporting literature was based on research performed with American students, the theory might still be applicable to that group. Theoretical structures relevant to the Canadian society must be developed in this area, but considerable empirical research must predate such activity.

2. A social desirability response set may have operated to influence the directions of the findings. The normative expectation within the university subculture is generally directed toward positive support for liberal viewpoints, and responses of the athletes may have been modified in conformity with this feature.

3. The humanistic orientation of many of the coaches of the intercollegiate sports at the University of Western Ontario, and the Canadian system of sport which rejects athletic scholarships (grants-in-aid) for student-athletes (unless such assistance is provided by the Federal Government) might act to socialize athletes in directions similar to those of the rest of the student body.

The results, however, clearly and consistently indicated that the Canadian athletes sampled did not differ significantly from nonathletic students enrolled at the same university. Both groups were predominantly liberal in their political ideologies and in their attitudes toward specific issues. Further study and replication is necessary to determine the features in the socialization experience relevant to the development of such political ideological structures among Canadian athletes.

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Table 1. Summary table of responses of athletes and nonathletes on the McClosky Political Conservatism Scale.

Item	Higher Conservative Rankings	Category of Major response	df	Chi Square	Prob.
1. Prefer practical man..(N=289)	Athletes	Liberal	2	0.061	NS
2. Change makes things worse..(N=291)	Athletes	Liberal	2	4.757	NS
3. Old modes have wisdom..(N=288)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	0.107	NS
4. Better to keep what you have... (N=291)	Athletes	Liberal	2	1.650	NS
5. Respect work of forefathers..(N=287)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	3.163	NS
6. Wisdom comes with age.. (N=290)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	1.814	NS
7. Political authority from higher power ...(N=288)	Nonathletes	Conserv.	2	1.075	NS
8. See if a new mode works first..(N=291)	Athletes	Liberal	2	0.049	NS
9. Harmony possible without change... (N=293)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	1.690	NS

NS = not statistically significant at p. 05.

Table 2 Responses of athletes and nonathletes to Self Report Political Ideology Scale (N=236)

Group	Liberal, Radical or Revolutionary	Middle of the Road	Conservative or Extreme Conservative	Total
Athletes (N=134)	50.7	35.1	14.2	100.
Nonathletes (N=102)	57.8	29.4	12.7	100.

X^2 = 1.199, not significant at p.05.

Table 3. Responses of athletes and non-athletes to issue-oriented polical ideology items.

ISSUE	Higher Conservative rankings	Category of Major response	df	Chi Square	Prob.
1. Shoplifting a legitimate political act (N=292)	Athletes	Conserv.	2	6.306	.05
2. Trashing as politically justifiable. (N=291)	Athletes	Conserv.	2	0.046	NS
3. Violence in defense of a cause justifiable. (N=290)	Nonathletes	Conserv.	2	0.647	NS
4. Demonstrations must be non-violent... (N=288)	Athletes	Conserv.	2	2.829	NS
5. Legalize sof drugs (N=292)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	0.485	NS
6. Hard drugs available on prescription (N=292)	Athletes	Conserv.	2	1.452	NS
7. Turn-in-a-Pusher Program worthwhile (N=292)	Athletes	Liberal	2	7.323	.05
8. Cut welfare rolls (N=293)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	0.886	NS
9. Legal System protects powerful. (N=291)	Athletes	Conserv.	2	5.797	NS
10. Political system protects weak and strong.. (N=292)	Athletes	Conserv.	2	2.609	NS

Table 3 (Continued)

Issue	Higher Conservative ranking	Category of Major response	df	Chi square	Prob.
11. Wealth is unjustly distributed..(N=293)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	5.420	NS
12.Poor cannot get fair trial.(N=292)	Athletes	Conserv.	2	3.084	NS
13. Abortion is murder ..(N=293)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	2.397	NS
14. Abortion as nobody's business but the woman's..(N=293)	Athletes	Liberal	2	0.441	NS
15. Grades as sole Uni. entrance criteria ...(N=293)	Athletes	Mixed	2	1.158	NS
16. Hippies are degenerates.. (N=291)	Athletes	Liberal	2	5.741	NS
17. Attack radical demonstrators.. (N=289)	Nonathletes	Liberal	2	10.083	.01
18. Kick radicals, etc. off campus.... (N=289)	Athletes	Liberal	2	1.005	NS

Table 4 Responses of athletes and nonathletes to Rehberg Political Activism Scale

Item	Proportion of agreement	High agreement group	df	Chi square	Prob.
1. I would march to support cause.. (N=288)	77.8[a]	Nonathletes	1	0.012	NS
2. I would organize meetings for cause (N=284)	65.5[a]	Athletes	1	6.267	.02
3. It would strike to support cause ..(N=286)	66.4[a]	Athletes	1	2.708	NS
4. I would sit-in to support cause (N=286)	66.8[a]	Nonathletes	1	0.116	NS
5. I would take part in political campains (N=290)	73.1[a]	Nonathletes	1	0.005	NS
6. I couldn't care less about political involvement (N=286)	20.6	Nonathletes	1	1.039	NS
7. I readily accept marijuana laws (N=284)	41.5	Nonathletes	1	0.003	NS
8. I readily accept heroin laws (N=284)	78.2	Athletes	1	7.975	.01
9. I readily accept powers of police (N=288)	74.7	Athletes	1	0.124	NS
10. I readily accept powers of univ. establishment (N=284)	53.9	Athletes	1	0.122	NS

[a] = agreement to this item is regarded as an activist response